Why is it important to carefully consider questions that are used for evaluations?

* Evaluation questions provide the basis for doing the evaluation it self
* If the right questions are not asked it will not be possible to garner the information required to seek answers that we want of the evaluation
* Means by which to focus and direct our attention

What is the divergent phase of planning an evaluation?

* The part of the evaluation process that determines what questions will be asked – “shopping list” of questions so to speak
* Evaluator must try garner a thorough understanding of the viewpoints of stakeholders
* Information garnered through conversation, observation and a review of existing documents

What is the role of the stakeholder in this process?

* Stakeholders are central for the evaluator in order to determine the questions to be asked in the evaluation
* Of central importance is to get to the essence of the stakeholder’s questions, insights, perceptions, hopes and fears to determine the focus of the evaluation” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2007, p. 235).
* Stakeholder input is an important element in the evaluation process – a means by which to validate the work being done – in that stakeholders are far more likely to use the evaluation information if they had a part in the process of developing it
* Means by which to hear the voice of those stakeholders that have less “power” in the process
* Imperative that the evaluator elicit information from stakeholders in ways that are meaningful to the stakeholder: *listening* is key
* Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen (2007) identify a list of questions that could be used to draw out the required information from stakeholders
* It is important to understand which framework the evaluator plans to base their work – it guides the questions to ask stakeholders\

What are other sources of garnering questions?

* Use of checklists, professional standard and criteria developed elsewhere
* Asking content experts
* Evaluators own profession judgement
  + Given their experience they are likely to have a good idea of what needs to be asked

What is the next step in the process?

* It will be necessary to summarize the suggested garnered from all of the stakeholders
* Categorize based on the type of study; e.g. Needs assessment or context; process and monitoring; outcomes

What is the Convergent phase and who should do it?

* Where the evaluator narrows down the ‘shopping list’ garnered in the divergent stage to ones that best fit the goals of the evaluation
* Six broad ranged questions have been identified to assist in determining which questions should make up part of the evaluation. Some examples include:
  + Who’d use the information?
  + Would the answers provide new information?
  + Would the answer provide useful information?
  + Does it add to the comprehensiveness of the evaluation?
  + Are there adequate resources to answer the questions?
* Determining which questions that should be asked can be done through discourse with the stakeholders
* Of fundamental that his process is done – this is basis of evaluation
* Of note is the consideration of the use of standards

Why is important to remain flexible during evaluation?

* Need to be able to take into account changes that occur during the evaluation process; thereby altering the course of the evaluation accordingly
* Evaluator needs to reflect on how the changes affects the list of questions that have been determined

What is it necessary to select a design for an evaluation?

* The design denotes the structure or the basis for data collection
  + What sources and methods of data collection will be used
* Evaluator determines the design that is appropriate for each evaluation question in consultation with stakeholders
* Evaluator needs to determine if their design is casual or descriptive
  + Causal – use of experimental or quasi experimental designs
  + Descriptive (more common) – or “thick description” as it is called by Guba and Lincoln (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2007, p.263)
* Determination of the design used for each evaluation questions enhances the communication between stakeholders and evaluators as it allows stakeholder the opportunity to raise concerns they may have about data collection

Why is it necessary to determine appropriate sources of information?

* Since the goal of asking questions is seeking answers, it is necessary that the evaluator determine wither information can actually be gained
* Not every question need be answered by directly to the original source
  + Use of both primary and secondary sources
  + Use of existing date that is relevant
  + Public documents and databases
  + However, just because the data exists doesn’t necessarily mean that it needs to be used
* The client may also have a good idea from where best to seek further information

What are some methods of data collection?

* Directly from individuals identified as sources of information
* Dependent observer
* From technological device
* From unobtrusive measures
* From existing informational resources
* In collecting data it is important that the evaluator determine if the information collected matches the question being asked. In other words, is it necessary to garner information through more than just means of inquiry?

What are some important things to consider when collecting information?

* Determine what sampling procedures will be used
* Determine how information will be collected and by whom
  + Are they skilled to do what is expected of them
* Determine when the information will be collected
  + This is of great importance in terms of timelines

What other steps need to be taken is setting up the evaluation design?

* Evaluators must determine not only how the information will be collected, but how the information is analyzed
* Determine how results will be interpreted for each question being asked
* Determine how evaluation finding will be reported
  + Who are each of the evaluations questions target audience
  + Through the use of a matrix that specifies for each question:
    - The audience
    - The content to be included
    - Reporting format
    - The date of the report
    - Context in which report to be presented
* The final step is describing how it will be carried out – management plan. It must specify for each evaluation question the following:
  + Task to be performed and time lines for each task
  + Personnel and resources required to complete the task
  + The cost
  + *The use of a PERT chart or Gantt chart can prove helpful*

What are factors that should be considered in developing an evaluation budget?

* Evaluation staff salary and benefits
  + Who will perform various tasks
* Consultants
  + To fill the skills gap or independent perspective on program or evaluation
* Travel and per deim (staff and consultants)
* Communication
* Printing and copying
* Data processing
* Printed materials
* Supplies and equipment
* Subcontracts – outside services (accounting/legal, etc)
* Overhead (facility, utilities)

How does what determine the data plans collection method(s) for the evaluation?

* Those within the field of evaluation have come to the conclusion that there is “no one best” way to collect data. Therefore emphasize the necessity to use mixed methods
* Purposes for mixed methods:
  + Triangulation – use of multiple methods to measure validity
  + Complementarity - gain fuller understanding
  + expansion – provides a full picture, but not of one construct
* Ultimate goal is to obtain a better picture of that being measured
* Mixed method evaluations must be planned at considered at:
  + Political level
  + Philosophical level
  + Technical level

What are some of the designs that can be used for collected causal and descriptive information?

* Case study
  + Can include both qualitative and quantitative components
  + Useful in examining outcome issues
  + Focus is on the case itself and identify specific attributes
  + 3 features of case studies:
    - Focus on a selected case or cases
    - Desire for in-depth understanding of an issue
    - Collecting data in many different ways, but with focus on qualitative methods such as observation, interviewing and study of existing documents
* Experimental design
  + According to the authors, experimental or quasi-experimental design useful in the comparison of one program to another
  + Experimental designs are preferable to quasi-experimental designs(if it is feasible)
  + Post-test and pre-test design
* Quasi-experimental design
  + Used understanding of explanations for change other than the program

I am particularly interested in the use of case studies in terms of evaluation, as I am intrigued by the opportunity to give the participants a voice. It seems to me that the notion of power is of importance here, and through interviewing, and observing the participants, it is fundamental to truly listen to what they have to say. In terms of what we do at our organization, I think that to some extent this is what we are doing anyway, albeit not in any formal manner.

In terms of the experimental design I found it interesting that the notion of pre & post-testing falls into this category; but upon reflection it does make sense. In terms of my experience, I have wanted to set up a program that takes into account essential skills training (as set out by HRSDC) throughout the curriculum. In doing so I have wanted to include TOWES testing both at the outset of the program, and then upon conclusion to determine if the essential skills training provided for within the program increase the students essential skills that are measured by the TOWES test. I would have strong evidence to support that the inclusion of essential skills training in a program is useful; or would I. I would be able to see if there was ‘essential skills’ growth throughout the program, but to what is that growth attributed? Interactions with the instructor, counsellor or coordinator; relationships developed in the classroom; situations that occurred in outside of school? Unfortunately pre and post-testing doesn’t account for that. Therefore the inclusion of some other means to garner information would be imperative, and I believe that this could be done through a case study. So the pre and post-testing would be but one component in my overall plan to gain information to make the program even better.

In terms of the program that I am considering then, it seems t me that I need to engage in conversations with those that are closer to it to gain a sense of what we are looking for and what questions we should ask. And while it is unlikely we would, at least in the near future, engage in a full scale evaluation, these chapters have given me food for thought on how I could make that look. My fear is that it appears that evaluation is a timely process, and we neither have the resources, not the time to complete an in-depth evaluation. However, I think by using some of the tools discussed in the preceding chapters I would have a basic understanding of the processes I need to engage in to look at a ‘scaled’ back evaluation of this program, and others.